

Diana L. DeGette

1957–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

DEMOCRAT FROM COLORADO

1997–



Congressional Pictorial Directory
109th Congress

IN 1997, FOURTH-GENERATION DENVER RESIDENT Diana DeGette succeeded Pat Schroeder, one of the most colorful and influential women's rights advocates in the House. As a freshman House Member, Representative DeGette earned a seat on the prestigious Energy and Commerce Committee, from which she has focused largely on health care issues. In her first five terms, DeGette has steadily climbed the ranks of Democratic Caucus leadership, being promoted from Floor Whip to Chief Deputy Whip for the 109th Congress (2005–2007).

Diana DeGette was born on a U.S. Air Force base in Tachikawa, Japan, on July 29, 1957, the oldest of five children. Her parents—her father was an architect and her mother a teacher—returned to their hometown of Denver soon thereafter. After graduating from Denver's South High School in 1975, DeGette earned a B.A. in political science and philosophy from Colorado College in 1979. She was awarded a J.D. from New York University in 1982. After graduation, DeGette served as a deputy state public defender in Colorado from 1982 to 1984 before going into private practice. In 1985, she married attorney Lino Lipinsky; the couple has two daughters, Raphaela and Francesca. In 1992, DeGette was elected to the Colorado house of representatives, serving from 1993 to 1996. After just one term she was appointed assistant minority leader.

DeGette entered the race for the open congressional seat vacated by Denver Representative Pat Schroeder, the dean of women in the House and a liberal icon, in 1995. With the endorsement of Schroeder and influential environmental and labor groups, DeGette easily defeated Denver councilman Tim Sandos in the Democratic primary.¹ In the general election, she faced Republican Joe Rogers, a lawyer who was the first African American to seek national office in Colorado. DeGette ran on a platform that included health care and education reform as well as environmental protection. She also regularly criticized the Republican efforts to slash core entitlement programs in the 104th Congress (1995–1997), arguing that the government must preserve programs such as Social Security, Medicare, Head Start, child nutrition, and prenatal care. DeGette cruised to a 57 to 40 percent win in the heavily Democratic district. In four re-election bids, DeGette has never seriously been challenged, winning between 66 and 73 percent of the vote.²

Representative DeGette has held a coveted seat on the Energy and Commerce Committee since her first term. In 2005, she was also named to the House Democratic Leadership as a Chief Deputy Whip after serving two years as Floor Whip and four years as a Regional Whip. On the Energy and Commerce Committee, DeGette serves on three subcommittees: Health; Oversight and Investigations; and Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection.

Even as a minority party member, Representative DeGette has shown an ability to work across the aisle to get legislation passed. DeGette focused on health care for children, introducing an amendment for “presumptive eligibility” for Medicaid for children from poor families, that allowed hospitals and doctors to start the application process for government aid. She also authored successful legislation that provided a higher priority for children on waiting lists for organ donations.

Using skills honed as a trial attorney in Colorado, DeGette played a leading role in a number of prominent committee hearings. These included the 2002 hearings into the corporate accountability scandals and the 2004 investigations into the safety of dietary supplements and the practice of prescribing antidepressants to children. In 2006, DeGette took a leadership role in the growing problem of child exploitation over the Internet.

As part of her work on health issues, DeGette emerged as one of the congressional leaders in the debate over embryonic stem cell research. In 2005 legislation to expand federal funding of embryonic stem cell research authored by DeGette passed the House with overwhelming bipartisan support despite strong opposition from President George W. Bush. DeGette’s personal experience as the mother of a diabetic child factored into her work as the co-chair of the Congressional Diabetes Caucus, a group that seeks to educate Members on the disease and advance legislation on research and medical care.³

DeGette was a dependable vote for much of the Democratic Party’s legislative agenda. She supported abortion rights and opposed the death penalty. In 2000, she supported permanent normal trade relations with China—a move welcomed by business but opposed by labor. DeGette also has focused on growth issues within her rapidly expanding Denver district. She sponsored a successful amendment to increase federal funding for the Environmental Protection Agency’s Brownfields program which identifies and restores abandoned urban spaces. Since 1999, she has sponsored the Colorado Wilderness Act, a plan to protect 1.4 million acres of federal land on the western slope of the Colorado Rocky Mountains.

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, “Diana DeGette,”
<http://bioguide.congress.gov>

NOTES

- 1 Guy Kelly, “DeGette Easily Wins 1st District Over Sandos; Former State Representative Favored for Schroeder’s Seat,” 14 August 1996, *Denver Rocky Mountain News*: 5A.
- 2 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.
- 3 “It Doesn’t DeGette Any Better; Congressional Representative Diana DeGette, Mother of Diabetic Child,” *Diabetes Forecast* 52 (1 June 1999): 44.